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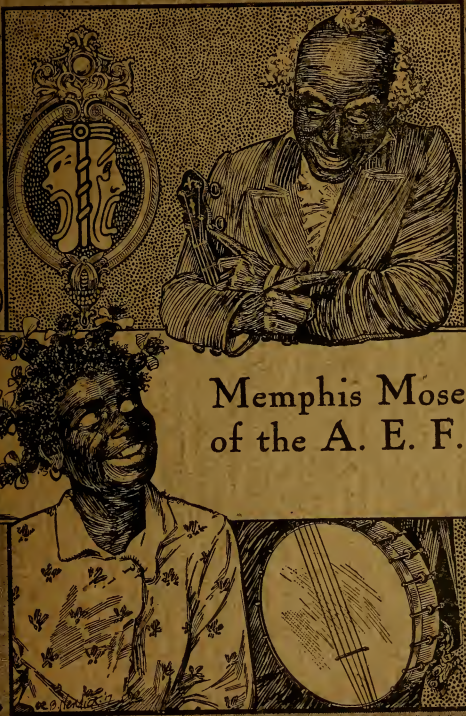

Memphis Mose of the A. E. F.

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MEMPHIS MOSE OF THE A. E. F.

MILITARY MINSTREL AFTERPIECE

BY

WADE STRATTON

AUTHOR OF

"Almost An Actor," "An Awful Appetite," "The Barber's Bride," "A Burnt Cork Barrage," "Cash Money," "Fu'st Aid to Cupid," "Hitting the African Harp," Kiss Me, Camille!" "When Cork Is King," etc.

CHICAGO
T. S. DENISON & COMPANY
PUBLISHERS

MEMPHIS MOSE OF THE A. E. F.

PS635
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CHARACTERS.

MEMPHIS MOSE.....*Nearly a Welfare Worker*
PHILBERT NUTT .....*His Companion*
GENERAL ROWSE MITTUM.....*A Dusky Dutchman*
PRIVATE VERBOTEN .....*Some of His Army*
PRIVATE ZWEIBEER .....*Some More*
BIGFOOT SUE .....*A Red Cross Nurse*
SOLDIERS .....*As You Wish*

SCENE—*An Enemy Encampment.*

TIME—*War Time.*

PLACE—*Over the Pond.*

TIME OF PLAYING—*About Twenty-five Minutes.*

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NOV 12 1921

no 1

COSTUMES.

MEMPHIS MOSE—Ordinary suit, leather leggings and long linen duster covering all.

PHILBERT NUTT—Dilapidated clothing and blue cap. Very droll in speech and slow in action.

GENERAL ROWSE MITTUM—Misfit, many colored, dilapidated uniform, with large hat ornamented with a large plume. Has a large mustache, which he stroke in pompous, fierce manner. Wears an absurd "iron cross," very large, and other military decorations.

PRIVATE VERBOTEN—Blue coat, brass buttons, white pants and old cap. Carries an old musket.

PRIVATE ZWEIBEER—Old blue suit, short trousers and straw hat. Carries a battered old sword.

BIGFOOT SUE—Typical darky wench part; calico dress, white apron and sleeves and nurse's white cap. On one sleeve is a red cross.

NOTE.—While only six characters are required, more may be added at option of producer. Your local organization may act as "the army" and the dialogue may be so arranged that a drill be introduced without detriment to plot or action. The costume descriptions are merely suggestions. Many ludicrous "uniforms" can be originated. Some of the "army" might wear old pajama suits, dyed bright green. All characters in the skit are blackface.

PROPERTIES.

Rifles for Verboten and Zweibeer; bowl of bread and milk, large spoon and two napkins for Sue; chicken bone for Mose; stretcher for Nutt.

STAGE DIRECTIONS.

R. means right of stage; *C.*, center; *R. C.*, right center; *L.*, left; 1 *E.*, first entrance; *U. E.*, upper entrance; *R.* 3 *E.*, right entrance, up stage, etc.; *R. D.*, right door; *L. D.*, left door, etc.; *D. F.*, door in flat or back of the stage; up stage, away from footlights; down stage, near footlights; 1 *G.*, first groove, etc. The actor is supposed to be facing the audience.

MEMPHIS MOSE OF THE A. E. F.

SCENE: *An exterior to represent a woodland, with mountain or landscape drop in 3 G. and wood wings. A small white canvas tent at C., with flaps drawn over opening. On center pole peak is a small German flag. (Omit if difficult to procure.) At L. of tent are two nail kegs marked: "Powder." A small table and a camp chair in front of tent.*

MUSIC: *Some familiar A. E. F. tune, to raise and lower curtain.*

At rise, PRIVATE VERBOTEN, MOSE *and* NUTT *are discovered.* VERBOTEN *is doing sentry duty, pacing to and fro from R. to L. back of tent.* NUTT *and* MOSE *are seated on nail kegs in despondent attitudes.* MOSE *has one leg heavily bandaged and* NUTT *wears a bandage on left arm.*

NUTT. Well, why don't yo' say somethin'?

MOSE. Dere ain't a word to be sayed. (*Rubs bandaged leg.*)

NUTT. Yo' said a-plenty 'fo' we got to dis side ob de Rhine. Yo' done talked yo' head off back in Memphis. (MOSE *nods head despondently.*) Didn't yo' say: "Philbert, a barber shop ain't no place fo' yo'. Yo' should be a adventuress." Didn't yo' say dat to me? (MOSE *nods as before.*) Didn't yo' also said to me: "Philbert, shinin' shoes ain't yo' vacation in life. Yo' should co-harmonize wid de higher equivalents. Yo' should be a soldier o' fortune." Didn't yo' said dat to me? (MOSE *again nods head.*) Den yo' said: "Philbert, cast aside dem ignoble brushes and come wid me. Dere is war in Europe." Didn't yo' say dem words to me?

MOSE. Ah did, and heah we is.

NUTT. Yes, heah we is; prisoners ob war. (*Rubs a hand over bandage, painfully contorted face.*)

MOSE. Well, dare ain't nothin' dishonorable in bein' a prisoner ob war.

NUTT. Maybe not. But if Ah was fixin' fo' to be a prisoner, Ah could a got in jail back in Memphis.

MOSE. Ah, but, Philbert, dere am a lot ob difference.

NUTT. Yes, Ah could a-had mah reg'lar eats back in dat Memphis jail.

MOSE. Oh, yo' always think ob eatin'.

NUTT. And dat's all Ah do, is jes' think ob it, lately. Say, man, mah stomach could be arrested fo' what it thinks ob me.

MOSE. Shucks, man, dis am merely a condition ob de fortunes ob war.

NUTT. Yes, but yo' didn't say dis was gwine to happen when yo' slung dat flowery talk back in Memphis. No, sah. Yo' say: "Philbert, dem Dutchmen couldn't hit de water if dey fell out ob a boat." Didn't yo' say dat?

MOSE. Well?

NUTT. Well, dey had nuther water or a boat, but dey sure did hit us. (*Hand to bandage.*)

MOSE. Dat was 'cause we tried to run.

NUTT. Tried to run? Man, Ah did run! Ah got three years exercise in jes' one second. But de faster Ah run, de faster dat bullet run. (*Looks cautiously about at* VERBOTEN, *who has been pacing back and forth.*) Dat nigger gets on my nerves.

MOSE. Nigger? Man, he ain't no nigger. He's a Dutchman.

NUTT. Shucks! It he's a Dutchman, Ah'm a dime's worth of Hungarian goolash. Whatta yo' reckon dere fixin' to do wid us?

MOSE. Oh, soon's dey find out Ah'm a "Y" secketary, dey'll release us.

NUTT (*disgustedly*). "Y" is we here? Dat's what Ah axes yo'. A lot yo' knows about welfare! (*Gun is fired off L.* NUTT *and* MOSE *exhibit comedy fright.* VERBOTEN *wheels, faces to L. in a challenging attitude.*)

VERBOTEN (*calling off L.*). Halt! Who goes thar?

ZWEIBEER (*off L.*). Friend!

VERBOTEN. Advance, friend, and give de countersign.

NUTT (*to* MOSE). Didn't Ah tell yo'? Dat's jes' plain nigger talk, dat's all.

Enter ZWEIBEER *from L., whispers to* VERBOTEN.

VERBOTEN (*to* ZWEIBEER). Yo' gotta know de countersign. Ah got mah orders. Dem orders is dat if yo' don't say "Fried Chicken," Ah runs mah bayonet through yo'.

ZWEIBEER. "Fried chicken."

VERBOTEN. All right. Now who yo' all shoot at jes' now?

ZWEIBEER. 'Twasn't nobody. But Ah thought Ah seen dem two niggers tryin' ter make a getaway. (*Comedy fright by the two.*)

VERBOTEN. Say, dere ain't a chance in de world.

ZWEIBEER. No, dem low-down plain niggers am outclassed 'longside ob us Heinies.

VERBOTEN. Ah wonder what de general am gwine do wid 'em.

ZWEIBEER. Oh, jes' naturally shoot dem at sunrise, dat's all.

MOSE (*to* NUTT, *in nervous fright*). Yo' heah dat? Gwine to shoot us at sunrise.

NUTT. Not me. Ah don't get up dat early.

The tent flaps are suddenly flung apart and enters there-from GENERAL ROWSE MITTUM. *He strikes a fierce comedy pose and strokes mustache for an instant. Then he glowers at the prisoners and they attempt to hide behind each other.*

GENERAL (*sharply*). Attention! (VERBOTEN *and* ZWEIBEER *bring their guns to an awkward salute, wheel and march stiffly to the* GENERAL, *and when within a couple of paces of him, trip and almost fall.*) Fall in!

VERBOTEN. Yes, sah, we jes' did, General.

NUTT (*advancing toward the* GENERAL, *smiling*). Oh, Ah knows yo'. Yo' was fo'merly a barber back in Memphis.

GENERAL (*fiercely, to* NUTT). Silence! (*To* ZWEIBEER.) Anythin' to repo't?

ZWEIBEER. Yes, sah. Ah jes' killed ninety-eight enemeeses.

GENERAL. Aha! Ninety-eight ob de enemy died by yo' hand?

ZWEIBEER. Yes, sah; one hand.

GENERAL. Den yo' kin knock off work fo' de day. Yo' done enough. (ZWEIBEER *salutes in comedy fashion.*) Privat Verboten, what yo'-all done fo' yo' country?

VERBOTEN. Ah run 'cross seventy-eight enemeeses and cut off dere feet.

GENERAL. Cut off dere feet? And why didn't yo' cut dere heads off? (*Comedy fright by prisoners.*)

VERBOTEN. Oh, somebody else done dat 'fore Ah got dere.

GENERAL (*violently clears throat, fiercely strokes mustache and glowers at the prisoners.*) Bring de prisoners to headquarters. (VERBOTEN *and* ZWEIBEER *go behind* NUTT *and* MOSE *and prod them with their bayonets, forcing them to the* GENERAL.)

NUTT (*protestingly to* GENERAL). Whatta dey mean by stickin' us wid dem bay-nets?

GENERAL. It means dat yo' am wanted at headquarters.

NUTT. Headquarters! Dat ain't whar dey stuck us wid dem bay-nets.

GENERAL. Silence! (*Sits at table.*) Yo' am gwine now ter git court-martialed.

NUTT. If dat's somethin' good ter eat, Ah been ready fo' two days now.

GENERAL. Silence! (*To* MOSE.) What's yo' name?

MOSE. Memphis Mose, sah.

GENERAL. Whar yo' from?

NUTT. Yo' know whar he's from. Yo' is from de same place—Memphis.

GENERAL (*fiercely*). Silence! (*Each time the* GENERAL *yells "silence" at* NUTT *the latter jerks his head sharply in affright and his cap falls to floor.*)

NUTT (*as he stoops, picks up hat and replaces it on head*). Doggone dat nigger, anyhow!

GENERAL (*to* NUTT). What's yo' name?

NUTT. Yo' know doggone well what mah name is.

GENERAL. Whar was yo' born, and if so, why?

NUTT. Ah don't know.

GENERAL. Whatta yo' mean yo' don't know? Didn't yo' ever have no mother?

NUTT. Ah don't know.

GENERAL. Who was with yo' when yo' was born?

NUTT. My aunt.

GENERAL. On what day was yo' born?

NUTT. Thursday.

GENERAL (*fiercely and fingering mustache*). Aha! Now Ah got yo'. Yo' don't know nothin' 'bout a mother, but yo' do know what day yo' was born on. How comes it dat yo' know what day yo' was born on?

NUTT. 'Cause de next day we had fish.

GENERAL (*rising to feet with an angry stamp and twirling mustache*). Silence! (*To* ZWEIBEER *and* VERBOTEN.) Take de prisoners away. Take dem to de deepest and darkest dungeon. (*They place themselves on either side of the prisoners.*)

NUTT (*to* GENERAL). Say, what's a dungeon?

GENERAL (*rising to feet, stamps a foot angrily and strokes mustache*). Silence! (*To* ZWEIBEER *and* VERBOTEN.) Take de prisoners to de dungeon. (*They place themselves on either side of the prisoners.*)

NUTT (*to* GENERAL). Say, what's a dungeon? Do dat happen to be Dutch talk fo' dinin' room?

GENERAL. Nothin' like it. Dere ain't gwine to be no eatin'.

NUTT. No eatin'? (GENERAL *shakes head.*) Den shoot me now. (GENERAL *raises his hand as a command for the prisoners to be taken away. The prisoners are between the two soldiers, single file. The four march in a brisk, military fashion once about the stage, the* GENERAL *places himself at their head and they are about to exeunt R. when—*)

Enter BIGFOOT SUE. *She starts in astonishment, raises her hands with a commanding gesture and the five halt.*

SUE. Halt! Doggone yo', halt!

MOSE (*in glad surprise*). Sue! (*He opens his arms and* SUE *rushes and throws herself forcibly against him, knock-*

ing him to floor and she falling on top. The others show astonishment. The fallen ones scramble to their feet.)

GENERAL. What am de meanin' ob dis?

SUE (*to* GENERAL). Back up, yo' unemployed load ob coal; back up! Dis am mah sweetheart from Memphis, Tennessee.

MOSE (*kisses* SUE). Yo' sweet little bunch o' peaches and cream, yo'.

NUTT (*aside*). Dat man always am talkin' 'bout somethin' to eat, jes' ter make me jealous.

GENERAL (*to* SUE). Stand aside! Dose men am prisoners ob war.

SUE (*angrily to* GENERAL). Don't yo' tell me to stand aside or any place else. Yo' get 'long and take yo' doggone army wid yo', or Ah'll fetch yo' a swat dat'll make yo' think de provocation ob eternity am arroven. (*Threatens him with fist.*)

GENERAL (*to the two privates*). Attention! Fall in! Fo'ward march! (*Marches with "army" off R.*)

MOSE (*throwing his arms about* SUE). Saved! Saved!

NUTT (*tugging at his coat sleeve*). Ask her fo' somethin' ter eat, man, den we'll all be saved.

SUE (*releasing herself and looking at* NUTT *in seeming surprise*). Who's yo' friend, Mose, deah?

MOSE. Ah don't know. Ah nevah saw him befo' in all my life. (*Comedy business by* NUTT.)

SUE (*to* MOSE). Den pay no further 'tention to him. We will be happy, jes' yo' and me together.

MOSE (*to* NUTT). Yes, little boy, run 'long and sell yo' papers. (NUTT, *too astonished for speech, staggers to one of the kegs and drops weakly on it, staring at them with wide open mouth and eyes.*)

SUE. Mah darlin'. Yo' mus' be dreadful hungry. (*Business by* NUTT.) Yo' jes' wait heah a second. Ah got some nice things already cooked; lovely eatin' things. (*Kisses him.*) Jes' a minute and Ah'll be right back. (*Waddles in comedy manner to R., turns and blows a kiss at him, then exits. He blows several kisses in return and stands looking off R. after her.*)

NUTT (*unable to longer restrain himself*). Look heah, yo' possum-eyed, disappointed imitation ob a bottle ob ink—

MOSE (*turning and surveying* NUTT *coldly*). Was yo' 'dressin' yo' conversation to me, sah?

NUTT (*astounded*). Yo'—yo' mean yo' don't disorganize me?

MOSE. Yo' face am slightly familitary, but Ah don't seem to place yo'. (NUTT *drops weakly back on keg.*)

Enter SUE, *R. She carries a large bowl filled with bread and milk, a large spoon and two napkins.*

SUE (*to* MOSE). Heah yo' is, honey-lamb. Come heah and inaugerate yo' system wid some ob dis ambigious chicken soup. (MOSE *smiles broadly and goes to* SUE *at C.* NUTT *hurriedly rises and also rushes to her.* SUE *takes the two napkins and tucks one under each one's chin, then takes spoon, dips it in bowl and stirs vigorously.* NUTT *smacks lips in keen anticipation.* SUE *dips a spoonful,* MOSE *opens mouth wide and she feeds it to him. Then she takes another spoonful, starts to feed* NUTT *but takes it herself.*)

MOSE (*in keen relish*). Mah goodness, sweetheart, but dat sure am beautiful chicken soup. Do it again. (SUE *gives him another spoonful, then repeats business of almost feeding* NUTT *and eating the spoonful herself.*)

SUE. What became ob dat other feller dat was heah a while back?

MOSE. Him? Oh, he's gone.

NUTT (*opens eyes and tugs at his coat sleeve*). No, no; heah Ah is—heah Ah is. (MOSE *ignores him.*)

SUE (*feeding* MOSE *another spoonful*). Ah didn't care so much fo' de looks ob him. He had a funny look.

NUTT (*attempting to attract her attention*). No, not funny; jes' hungry, lady; jes' a hungry look, lady; dat's all. (*They ignore him.*)

SUE (*to* MOSE, *puckers up lips and thrusts out her face in ludicrous manner*). Honey-bud, kiss yo' little angel-face. (*They kiss with comedy business.* NUTT *works up scene.*) Now, den, one mo' po'tion ob chicken soup. (*Feeds* MOSE.)

NUTT (*aside, disgustedly*). Dinner time fo' some folks, but jes' 12 o'clock fo' me.

SUE (*takes napkin from* MOSE'S *neck and carefully wipes his lips with it, then does the same to* NUTT.) Come, sweet breath ob evenin' breeze; come wid me to de canteen, whar Ah will fill yo' soul and inner man wid pangs ob real delight.

MOSE (*placing an arm about her waist*). Ah shall certainly be glad to do dat, mah beautiful bunch of pansy blossoms. Fo' Ah sure am hungry. (*They kiss.*)

NUTT (*aside, disgustedly*). Dere ain't no chicken soup 'bout dat. Dat am jes' plain "mush," dat's all; jes' plain "mush."

MOSE (*to* SUE). Let us go to de place whar all is eats and stomachs know no sorrow.

SUE. Yes, honey-bunch, we shall go. (*They stroll to R., his arm about her waist, and stop at exit R.*) Too bad yo' friend am went.

MOSE. Yes, it am too bad. Ah know he would enjoy hisself innumerably. He used ter like to eat. (*They exeunt.*)

NUTT (*looking after them, disgustedly*). Well, kin yo' beat dat? Ah *used* ter like to eat. Dat ain't no lie, Ah did used to, but Ah usen't to no mo'. (*Starts for exit R.*) Heah's whar Ah used to eat agin.

GENERAL, VERBOTEN *and* ZWEIBEER *come marching in from R. and halt* NUTT *as he is about to exit. As many extra soldiers as desired may be introduced here.*

GENERAL. Halt!

NUTT. Doggone it, dere's dat "halt" man agin.

GENERAL. Whar yo' gwine?

NUTT. Ah don't know, but Ah know whar Ah wish yo' was gwine.

GENERAL. And whar am dat?

NUTT. It's a long way from heah, and yo' wouldn't go if Ah told yo' to go.

GENERAL. Silence! (NUTT'S *cap falls off as his head jerks sharply back.*) Ah don't take no orders from yo'. Yo' takes orders from me. (*Indicates the kegs.*) Yo' see dem two powder kegs? (NUTT *eyes kegs apprehensively.*) Well, dem is got to go some place.

NUTT. Well, let 'em go. Ah ain't stoppin' 'em.

GENERAL. Dey is got to go, and it am too dangerous fo' mah soldiers to tote 'em, so Ah deploys yo' to tote 'em.

NUTT (*comedy fright*). Huh?

GENERAL. Dey am mighty dangerous, so yo' mus' be careful.

NUTT. Will dey—will dey—blewie?

GENERAL. Not if yo' am careful.

NUTT. Say, yo' bettah git yo' a regular careful boy. Ah'm too careless.

GENERAL. Oh, it won't make any difference if yo' am blown up; will it?

NUTT. No, not to anybody else but me; dat's all.

GENERAL (*sharply*). Fo'ward march! (VERBOTEN *and* ZWEIBEER *force* NUTT *to kegs.*) Now pick 'em up. (NUTT *hesitates and they prod him with their bayonets.*)

NUTT. Ah kin see Ah got a fat chance. If Ah don't pick 'em up, Ah gets mah tires punctured.

GENERAL. Yes.

NUTT. Yes, and if Ah does pick 'em up, Ah gits—blewie!

GENERAL. Pick 'em up! Fo'ward, march!

NUTT. Jes' a minute, General. Befo' de blewie comes, couldn't Ah be spared a little Dutch lunch?

GENERAL. No, sah. Fo'ward, march! (*Comedy drill may be introduced here, if desired. At its conclusion* VERBOTEN *and* ZWEIBEER *prod* NUTT *with bayonets, he picks up the kegs with comedy fright, they form in line,* GENERAL *leading,* NUTT *following him and the soldiers bring up the rear. Exeunt L.*)

Enter SUE *and* MOSE *from R. He is chewing on a chicken bone with keen relish.*

MOSE. Dat suttinly was some lunch.

SUE. Lunch? Man alive, if yo' calls dat a lunch, Ah wonder what yo'd call a meal?

MOSE (*looking searchingly about*). Ah wonder whar mah friend went? (*Loud explosion off L. Astounded, they run and look off L.*)

SUE. What was dat yo' was remarkin' 'bout jes' fo' dat explosion?

MOSE. Ah said Ah wonder whar mah friend went?

SUE (*shading eyes with one hand and then peering off*). Ah don't persactly know, but he'll be down in a minute and den yo' kin ask him.

MOSE (*looking off and up*). By golly, Ah nevah saw him git sich a move on hisself befo' in all mah life. He sure is in a hurry.

SUE. Now he's comin' down agin.

MOSE. Yes, Ah reckon he didn't like it up dar. (*The tramp of feet is heard off L., gradually drawing nearer.*)

SUE. Dey am bringin' him heah on a stretcher.

MOSE. Poor old Nutt! Ah'm sorry Ah was rude to him. He had his faults, but he wasn't sich a bad feller after all.

SUE. No, he was only hungry.

MOSE. Well, he's cured ob dat now all right.

SUE. He sure is. He's cured ob everythin'.

Enter GENERAL, VERBOTEN *and* ZWEIBEER, *the latter two bearing a stretcher on which lies* NUTT; *and extras if desired. They march solemnly to C. and place stretcher on floor, then all form a half circle about* NUTT, *the men removing their caps.*

GENERAL. We done our bestest to stop him after de powder went off, but he jes' naturally insisted on goin'.

MOSE. Poor old Nutt! He do look natural, don't he?

SUE. Ah'm sorry now Ah didn't gib him somethin' ter eat befo' he up and died. (NUTT *slightly raises his head and blinks eyes at* SUE.)

MOSE. Yo' sure he am dead?

ZWEIBEER. If he ain't he done git a powerful shock ter his system.

VERBOTEN. And it done look like it spread to de rest ob his body.

GENERAL (*sighs*). Ah'm 'fraid now he am but a remnant ob a man.

SUE (*excitedly*). What's dat yo' say? What's dat?

GENERAL. Ah say, he am but a mere remnant ob a man.

SUE (*drops on her knees beside the stretcher*). Man, deah, does yo' heah dat? Speak!

NUTT (*raises head and looks inquiringly at her*). What's it? What's it, lady?

SUE. Dat man say yo' am a mere remnant. If yo' am a remnant, Ah loves yo' and only yo'.

MOSE (*to* SUE). Heah, yo'. What yo' mean lovin' dat man?

SUE (*picks* NUTT *up from stretcher, arm about him*). Go way, Mistah Memphis Mose. Mention not mah name in endearin' terms agin. Ah loves yo' no mo'.

MOSE (*astounded*). What's—what's de meaning ob dis? Why fo' yo' transfer yo' love to dat man?

SUE. Why? Because he's a remnant. And whar am de woman livin' dat kin resist a remnant? (SUE *throws her arms about* NUTT, *the others form half circle about them, exhibiting intense astonishment, to*—)

CURTAIN.

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